Information Link

A Source of Information for Our Customers

ITD Announces New Customer Services Division
Mike Ressler

The Information Technology Department (ITD) is pleased to announce the creation of its new "Customer Services Division." This division is responsible for coordinating the people, processes, and technologies used within ITD to enhance its service delivery and support. It is also responsible for promoting customer relations, facilitating the alignment of ITD's services with customer expectations, and providing a timely and accurate response to customer problems, inquiries, and work requests. ITD's Service Center (or Help Desk) now resides within this division.

Gary J. Vetter has been selected as the Director of the Customer Services Division. Gary has 17 years experience with ITD and has worked closely with customers at all levels of North Dakota State Government. One of Gary's duties will be to act as an ombudsman for ITD and its customers. In this capacity, he will provide a point of contact to receive, investigate, and report on customer concerns. ITD's Service Center, which can be contacted at (701) 328-4470, continues to be the frontline for answering questions and resolving day-to-day problems. However, when you have unique feedback, questions, or concerns regarding ITD services, please feel free to contact Gary for assistance at (701) 328-4316.

Terese Birnbaum has been selected as the Customer Service Center Manager. Terese, who has 20 years experience with ITD, brings a customer-focused, results-oriented personality dedicated to providing outstanding customer service to the division. Terese's primary responsibility will be to manage the operations of ITD's Service Center. She will also play a key role in making it easier for customers to do business with ITD. Please do not hesitate to call upon Terese regarding any of your service center requirements. She may be reached at (701) 328-4471.

ITD is devoted to providing value and service to its customers. Creating the Customer Services Division raises the bar of commitment within ITD and offers you a resource for bridging your business requirements with technology. Together, we will drive constantly and consistently towards a goal of service excellence.

State Awards Contract to HP for Standard PC Configurations
Pat Forster

The State Procurement Office at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), working in conjunction with the Information Technology Department (ITD) and the State Enterprise Architecture program, has awarded a three-year contract to Hewlett Packard (HP) to supply the State's standard desktop and laptop computer configurations. The contract started December 1, 2004, and is available to all North Dakota state government agencies and institutions.

As reported in the October issue of *Information Link*, this contract is the culmination of a project started by the Enterprise Architecture program in early 2004 to begin moving state government toward a more standardized PC environment. The HP contract provides two standard PC configurations and two standard laptop configurations. Prices for the standard configurations are significantly discounted below standard government pricing such as that under the WSCA program used in the past. For example, the State's mainstream desktop configuration which includes a Pentium 4 - 3.0 Gigahertz processor with 500 Megabytes of memory is priced at $550.

The contract also provides discounted pricing for a variety of CRT and flat panel monitors, and a selection of upgrade options and peripherals. A custom web site is available for North Dakota agencies to obtain information about the equipment available on the contract, create quotes, and place orders. The HP State of North Dakota web site address is http://www.hp.com/buy/NorthDakota.

In approving the HP contract, The State Information Technology Advisory Committee (SITAC) designated the contract as a "mandatory term contract" for state agencies. This means that state agencies must purchase from the HP contract if they are purchasing PC equipment where the requirements can be met by the standard configurations available under the contract, unless the agency obtains a waiver from the State Procurement Office. Details on the HP term contract are available on the State Procurement web site at http://www.state.nd.us/csd/spo (click on "Agency Resources", "Term Contracts", and select Contract #22).

The HP contract is an example of the purchasing power that state government can exercise when it coordinates and aggregates its procurements. The standardization of PC equipment also brings longer term benefits in terms of simplifying technical support and lowering support costs. By using the standard specifications, an agency may be able to achieve a substantial savings on its overall PC investment.

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On the Job for ITD

Paul Roehrich, a Technical Support Specialist III, works for the Information Technology Department's (ITD) Computer Services Division.

Paul's job responsibilities include installing, monitoring, tuning, maintaining, and troubleshooting the ZOS server software and hardware, in addition to providing mainframe system support to state agencies. Employed by ITD for 16 years, Paul says he enjoys the challenges of an ever-changing computer industry.

A graduate of North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS) in Wahpeton, Paul earned an Associates Degree in Computer Science in 1987.

Some of Paul's hobbies include playing card games, softball, bowling, watching movies, and fishing.

Instant Messaging
Gary J. Vetter

Working in conjunction with the North Dakota Enterprise Architecture process, the Information Technology Department (ITD) is pleased to offer an "enterprise-grade" Instant Messaging (IM) Service.

There was a time when instant messaging was simply a growing Internet fad - a hip tool for Generation "Y-Not" folks to stay in touch with their online buddies. Yet research shows IM is now being fired up at work by 11 million people and has found its way into 84 percent of all North American companies. Indeed, casual, consumer-grade instant messaging has infiltrated the workplace - with or without the sanction and control of Information Technology (IT).

Despite its popularity, consumer-grade IM falls short of enterprise requirements. Issues related to security, archiving, integration, reliability, scalability, compliance, and standards have caused organizations to migrate towards their own enterprise-grade IM solutions.

In response to this trend, ITD is offering an IM solution based upon Microsoft's Live Communication Server. This system integrates tightly with the newly branded "Microsoft Office System," including Microsoft Office and Outlook. And unlike AOL, Yahoo, and MSN Messenger, all of the information transmitted stays safely within the boundaries of the ND state network.

> ITD is offering an IM solution based upon Microsoft's Live Communication Server.

Features include:

- **Presence Detection** to enable one computer user to see whether another user is currently logged on.

- **Messaging** to allow immediate, text-based conversations between two or more people.

- **Desktop Audio/Video Conferencing** to allow dynamic, on-demand sharing of information through a virtual "face-to-face" meeting.

- **White-boarding** to allow multiple users to write or draw on a shared virtual tablet.

- **File Transfer** to exchange digital files with people.

- **Application Sharing** to enable the user of one computer to take control of an application running on another user's computer.

- **Remote Desktop Control** to enable a support professional to take control of all functionality on another user's computer.
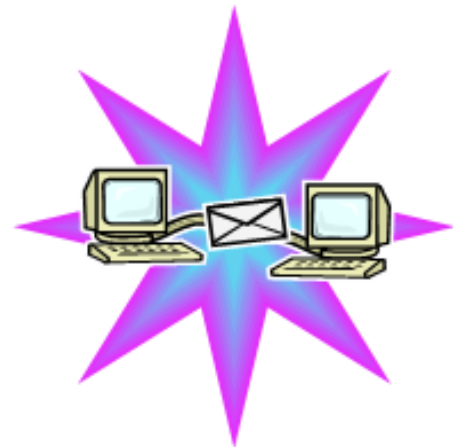
To learn more about deploying Instant Messaging within your agency, please visit ITD's homepage at www.discovernd.com/itd.

Making the Difference - Employee Recognition Program
Deborah Mosset

> Employees just really want a simple way to provide and/or receive "instant" positive feedback amongst themselves and their supervisors.

Because recognition plays a key role in both the success of an organization and maintaining employee satisfaction, a committee of Information Technology Department (ITD) employees launched an Employee Recognition Program in 2004. This committee was charged with the responsibility of creating a simple way to give employees positive feedback from either their supervisors or peers. The committee's "Making the Difference" initiative became the vehicle in which employees and management could use to recognize one another for things like a job well done, achievement, initiative, or acts of kindness, etc.

Initially, the committee surveyed ITD's employees to determine what recognition meant to them. Through this process, the committee discovered that recognition from both management and their peers was important to them. Employees just really wanted a simple way to provide and/or receive "instant" positive feedback amongst themselves and their supervisors. So the committee designed a simple process that employees could use. Employees just fill out a "Making the Difference" form and send it to individuals or teams to let them know their efforts are appreciated.

Since the program's inception more than six months ago, employees and managers participating in the program are finding that peer recognition truly does make a difference in how they view their job and their co-workers. In many cases, employees are realizing that it not only feels good to receive recognition, but that it feels even better to recognize someone else too.

In addition to overseeing the "Making the Difference" initiative, the committee sponsors other recognition activities throughout the year. The program is employee-based, so funds generated to support the program come from fundraising activities.

The Employee Recognition Committee encourages all of ITD's employees and its management team to use the program, and it extends an invitation to other state agencies to participate in the program if they wish to recognize an ITD employee. Recognition forms are located at most of ITD's reception desks and conference rooms. An online form is located on ITD's internet site, on the forms page, at http://www.state.nd.us/itd/forms/employee-recognition.pdf. Interested persons are welcome to fill out the form and send it directly to the ITD employee.

The Employee Recognition Committee can be contacted at -Info-ITD Employee Recognition Committee.

Service Oriented Architecture
Marlys Jangula

You may have seen topics on Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) in periodicals or heard about it at seminars. A large following indicates that this type of Architecture will become the mainstay of Information Technology (IT) business within the next couple of years. The following is a high-level overview of SOA.

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Typically, SOA describes an IT infrastructure, supporting services, tools, and processes intended for the construction of and combination of services within a scope that extends beyond a single application. It provides a method for linking resources on demand. In SOA, resources are made available to other participants in the network as independent services that are accessed through a standard methodology. This provides for a more flexible, loose coupling of resources than in traditional system architectures. At the base of the SOA are the business components/services:

- Components/services are modular and encapsulated.
    - Modularity implies breaking jobs in to small tasks.
    - Encapsulation means hiding the data and logic within each component from uncontrolled external access.
    - The component's interface is developed separately from its implementation - the program and data that actually perform the service.
- A business component/service can be replaced without disrupting other parts of the application.
- A well-designed component/service is limited to one type of activity or business entity such as customers, employees, or purchase orders.
    - A component/service may perform multiple functions (methods) related to the one entity.

The principles of a service are:
- Loosely coupled.
    - Coupling refers to the amount of dependency between modules, components, or services.
    - Loosely coupled services have few well-known dependences.
    - Overall flexibility.
- Location transparent.
- Discoverable and dynamically bound.
- Network-addressable interface capability.
- Interoperable.
- Self-contained and modular.
- Composable.

One of original ideas behind web services is that applications can be built from components that are published as services across the internet.

Benefits of SOA include the following:
- Applications and business processes can be more easily modified.
- Applications can be exposed more easily to diverse clients.
- Integration can be driven by business requirements.
- Applications can be deployed incrementally.
    - Services are rolled out independently.

Effective SOA leads to agile enterprise, faster time-to-market, increased quality, and reduced costs.

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Understanding Your Microsoft Software Assurance Benefits
David Comings
ASAP Software, Inc.

In fall of 2003, Microsoft launched an "Enhanced Benefits" offering under its Software Assurance (SA) program. This offering rewards SA subscribers with a set of benefits that will help boost productivity, increase support, and facilitate training; therefore, maximizing the value of Microsoft software license purchases.

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SA benefits are grouped into three general categories. Please click the links below for information on specific benefits, or click here for an overview of all Software Assurance Benefits.

Productivity - Software Assurance helps increase productivity. Your agency can access the latest technology when you need it, and choose to spread out payments annually. Individual agency employees may have access to benefits such as home use rights and discounts on Microsoft products for their personal use.

Support and Tools - Your agency may have access to Microsoft support professionals, resources, and tools to help Information Technology (IT) staff efficiently deploy software, as well as Problem Resolution Support to help keep business systems running smoothly.

Training - Everyone can realize greater efficiency with access to many levels of training in both instructor-led courses and eLearning, which give employees the flexibility to learn at their own pace. Employees get up to speed quickly on new products, and IT professionals keep up-to-date with the latest technical information. Agencies whose employees are educated with the latest knowledge are more productive and have a business edge, and IT staff can reduce the time it spends on help desk calls and end-user training.

How Do I Determine My Eligibility for Software Assurance Benefits?

Based on the State of North Dakota's Microsoft agreement structure, SA Benefits are tied to a Select Volume License agreement executed at the enrollment level. This means that each agency earns their own benefits based upon SA purchases made under their specific enrollment.

Software Assurance can be purchased along with Microsoft licenses on an ad-hoc basis. The more SA your agency purchases, the more benefits you will receive. Another way of receiving SA benefits is by committing to a Software Assurance Membership (SAM). It is offered to agencies who have selected to be a SAM member for one or more product pools on their Select enrollment. Designed to reduce costs across the entire product life cycle, SAM requires that all new license orders are purchased with Software Assurance for any product pool - Applications, Systems, or Server - under your agency's enrollment. By being a SAM member, your agency will realize maximum benefits under the Software Assurance program.

SA Benefits earned are accounted for and administered through a Microsoft licensing web portal called the Microsoft Volume License Services (MVLS) web site. The "Notices Contact" named under your agency's enrollment is the default MVLS Site Administrator. If your agency purchases Software Assurance and is eligible for SA Benefits, the MVLS Site Administrator will assign a Benefits Administrator to manage and distribute the benefits.

To learn more about or take advantage of your agency's accrued SA Benefits, please contact your agency's Benefits Administrator or MVLS Site Administrator.

Let ASAP Software Help You Maximize the Value of Your IT Investments

With a long history of serving state and local government organizations, ASAP Software provides the services you need to maximize the value of your IT investments. From determining the most cost effective IT procurement vehicles for your needs, to helping you understand your SA Benefits, ASAP Software will help you get the most for your IT dollar!

*If you have any questions regarding your Software Assurance Benefits, please contact a member of your ASAP Account Management Team - **Doug Galloway** at **800-248-2727 x5213** or **Lorri Rowan** at **866-465-2456.***